



The Big Love: Life & Death with Bill Evans

Laurie Verchomin

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Jazz music has never been a stranger to aberrant characters. Throughout the form's artistic and commercial heyday of the past hundred years, the only thing that has come close to upstaging its rapturous sounds are the actual individuals responsible for its creation. Further investigation into most facets of life, particularly where art is concerned, leads to a variety of unimagined eccentricities, but one would be hard-pressed to encounter a stranger gathering of folks than that of the jazz innovators of the twentieth century- an unsettling convergence of sound, addiction, enlightenment, passion, insanity, and everything in between. Yet, among this kaleidoscopic crowd, few entities compose a portrait as bewildering as that of Bill Evans. In the decades since his death, the character of Evans has, if nothing else, become harder to grasp. As his musical legacy continues its ascent to eternity, the creator responsible for this luminescent ladder somehow remains in the background. Whereas information on many jazz icon's personal lives has become readily available to anyone interested through numerous biographies and documentaries, practically everything published (and there is a fair amount) concerning Evans remains rooted in his music, as it well should. But the flaw in this matter is that, to his ever-expanding legion of devotees, Bill's influence stretches beyond that of music. From the moment he penned the Zen-tinged liner notes to *Kind of Blue*, Evans' public persona has taken on a spiritual air. The luxurious work created by his early trios only served to heighten this semblance. Though not lifted to any sort of leadership role, Evans was viewed by many as a sort of companion on a path to something extending beyond the general Western understanding of existence. Throughout his entire professional career, Evans was also hopelessly addicted to drugs, a fact that was no secret while he was alive, but one that remains difficult to absorb even today. Obviously drugs are not foreign objects in the jazz ambient, but it is too easy to simply throw Evans onto jazz's steep junkie pile. He was too intelligent, too administrative over his physical and emotional capacities to allow himself to succumb to an addiction which he did not really want. Why then was the man whose shimmering touch and blush-hued harmonies were responsible for transforming the piano into a jazz instrument as expressive and beautiful as any sighing horn such an afflicted soul? For those who have truly fallen under his spell, this lingering question weighs on his entire legacy. Perhaps the closest one will come to answering this and other questions concerning the pianist's personal life will be through Laurie Verchomin's memoir *The Big Love- Life and Death with Bill Evans*. For the final sixteen months of Evans' life, he and Ms. Verchomin were lovers. It was an incredibly intense period for Evans, both creatively and emotionally. At the time of their meeting, Laurie was only 22 and firmly entrenched in the post-Woodstock youth's quest for any and all forms of experience. Her recounting of this bohemian lifestyle and the resultant drug experimentation, sexual promiscuity, and aimless drifting are simultaneously touching and absurd, eliciting a response ranging from apathy to deep compassion. Laurie's account of her brief, but transforming period with this musical giant may not answer the questions that everyone yearns to have answered concerning Evans' divided and tortured soul. But at the end of it, one somehow admires Bill all the more, as a musician and as a human being. Excerpt from an article by By John Varrallo Musician & Writer

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